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2012 Intl Maize Conference Attendees Call for Increased Production

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Report Highlights:

Over November 22 – 24, 2012, the Government of Indonesia (GOI) and the Province of Gorontalo organized an International Maize Conference (IMC) in Gorontalo. The conference program consisted of four primary pillars, namely: 1) International Seminar on Agribusiness of Maize; 2) International Maize Expo; 3) Governor's Convention and Business Meeting; and 4) Farm Field Day.

General Information:

The theme of the 2012 International Maize Conference was “Maize for Food, Feed, and Fuel”. The conference was conducted at Maqna Hotel and Quality Hotel on November 22 - 24 November, 2012. Gorontalo is an Indonesian province located on the northern part of Sulawesi with a total area of 12,215.44 km² and a total population of just over one million people. Approximately 600 attendees including policy makers, scientists & researchers, extension-workers, industry leaders, and farmers from 12 countries attended the event. The Ministry of Agriculture’s Directorate General of Food Crops and the Agency of Agricultural Research and Development, in collaboration with the Gorontalo Provincial Office organized the event. The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (*Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo* or CIMMYT), and four multinational and Indonesian seed companies also supported the event. A major objective of IMC was to address challenges global consumers and producers of corn encounter vis-à-vis food production and bio-energy feedstock. Furthermore, the conference also provided an opportunity to share and exchange information, as well as ideas on corn research among scientists, policy makers, industries, and farmers.

Indonesia’s Vice Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Rusman Heriawan, officially opened the event. In his opening remarks he addressed the importance of corn as food, livestock feed, and feedstock for fuels. He added that Indonesia intends reach corn self-sufficiency in 2014. In addition, Vice Minister Heriawan emphasized the spirit of working together among government stakeholders, parliament, non-government organizations (NGO), private sectors, academia, media, and others to overcome challenges in corn production.

The International Seminar on Agribusiness of Maize, included a keynote session, three plenary sessions and four parallel sessions. In addition, 43 poster (what is meant by “poster”?) papers were exhibited in a poster session. The first main speaker, Dr. Haryono, the Director General of Agency of Agricultural Research and Development delivered the keynote address to the audience on the importance of corn for food, feed and fuel, as well as the challenges and opportunities of corn production. He further stated that the challenges for Indonesia to reach corn self-sufficiency are due to increasing demand, natural resource depletion and climate change. However, there are some opportunities to solve these problems by using enhanced agricultural technology and collaboration of farmers, extension workers, researchers, scientists, policy makers, private sectors, and other stakeholders. In addition, the second main speaker, Dr. Fadel Muhammad, the former Gorontalo Governor, shared his experience in developing corn for food security and farmer welfares during his governorship. He expressed his belief that Indonesia has the potential to become a net corn exporter.

During the plenary sessions, nine local and international speakers from a variety of international institutions, such as: CIMMYT of Kenya, Queensland University of Brisbane, the International Livestock Research Institute and the International Plant Nutrition Institute of India, and CIMMYT of Mexico presented different perspectives on using corn as food, feed, and biofuel. One of the speakers also explained how biotechnology can be a useful tool in addressing issues pertaining to food security. Furthermore, scientists and researchers reported their work including new findings from various areas of study related to corn, such as: seed technology, effective integrated pest management, socio-economic perspectives, genomic study, improved cultural practices, during the parallel sessions.

The widely attended seminar was well received by the attendees and positively covered by local media. Conclusions drawn from the seminar included an emphasis on increased global supply and the need to meet challenges to increased yields, such as climate change. All participants agreed to address the challenges in the spirit of togetherness to conduct research and development, as well as to develop more transparent markets. New innovative technologies should be supported by good policies. In addition, to minimize corn price volatility, it was suggested to prioritize corn for food over feed. Additionally, CIMMYT is in the process of establishing a branch office in Indonesia to support corn breeding.

The International Maize Expo held in conjunction with the conference introduced a variety of processed corn products and other agricultural commodities to the attending public, as well as potential business interests. Visitors were enthusiastic. An average of 1000 persons visited the expo daily. The organizer reported that there was some potential collaboration, not only between provinces in Indonesia but also between countries.

During the expo, Vice Minister Heriawan gave a press conference on the Government of Indonesia's position for increased corn production. He mentioned that currently Indonesia has not adopted biotechnology for corn production. It is not because Indonesia has rejected the technology, but because the government is taking an in depth assessment on the application of the technology. Conversely, the Indonesian Agency of Agricultural Research and Development distributed around 500 kg composite corn seed for free to the farmers in 2012. The Agency also offered training on farming practices to farmers.

A total of 100 persons including the Governors of Gorontalo and Riau, the Vice Governors of Lampung and West Sumatera, representatives from other major corn producer areas, private sectors, and farmers attended the Governor Convention and Business Meeting, which was held at Quality Hotel in Gorontalo. The meeting was chaired by the Director General of Food Crops, Mr. Udhoro Kasih Anggoro. One of the important results from this meeting was the agreement among the leaders of corn production areas. They identified steps to achieving increased production including incentives for growers and synergies among central, provincial, and district governments. The agreements in corn production were also signed between: (1) PT Sarinah and PT Saudi Indonesia Multi Investment (SIMI); (2) PT. Kemal Nasir Institute Jakarta and districts of Boalemo, Pohuwato and South Solok; (3) PT Sang Hyang Seri (SHS) and PT SIMI; (4) PT SHS and Pohuwato district and PT SIMI and Pohuwato district. PT Sarinah and PT SHS are both state-owned companies. PT. Sarinah has long been established as the GOI-sanctioned monopolistic importer of alcoholic beverages into Indonesia, while PT. SHS is one of the Indonesian major corn and paddy seed producers.

On the last day of the conference, a total of 300 participants visited the Agency for Maize Information Center to see several demonstration plots of corn. The head of the agency is a 2011 Cochran fellow on Plant Genetic and Food Crops training at the University of Missouri, Columbia, MO. The group also visited a corn farm at Tenilo Village, Limboto. In the field, participants observed various corn varieties that belong to public and private companies. The farm is designed to be integrated with cowshed and supported by feed storage, home composting and biogas equipment as well as various aspects of other supporting technologies such as agricultural equipment.

The organizer of the event reported that the IMC will be held every four years in different provinces of Indonesia.

